

The Circuit Breaker Property Tax Relief Program for Homeowners and Renters

What It Is:	A government funded program which provides a direct cash grant of up to \$700.00 every year to help people over 65 (and people who are totally disabled) to pay property taxes, mobile home taxes, rent, or nursing home charges. You can also get a discount on your license plate fee.
Where To Apply:	The Illinois Department on Aging administers the program. It provides the application form and instructions.
Who May Be Eligible:	You may be eligible if you are over 65, are under 65 and disabled from working, or you turned 63 or 64 before your spouse's death and your spouse was eligible. You must have lived in an Illinois residence that was subject to property or mobile home tax.

What is the Circuit Breaker Property Tax Relief Program?

The Circuit Breaker Property Tax Relief Program can provide you with a direct cash grant of up to \$700 to help pay property taxes, whether or not you are a homeowner. The Illinois Department on Aging administers this program.

Who is Eligible?

Non-Financial Eligibility Factors

To be eligible for the Property Tax Relief program, you must fall into one of the following groups:

- You are over 65 years of age at the beginning of the year in which you apply;
- You will turn 65 years of age during the year in which you apply;
- You are the widow or widower of a person eligible under the first two groups, and you turned 63 or 64 before your spouse's death;
- You are between 16 and 65 years of age, and you have a disability which prevents you from working at all, and which is expected to last for 12 months or more.

In addition, you must have lived during the year in one or more Illinois residences on which property or mobile home taxes must be paid. You must live in Illinois when you apply for the program.



ADVOCACY TIP

You do not have to be a homeowner to benefit from the Circuit Breaker Program. Renters (including those who rent mobile homes or lots), nursing home residents, retirement home residents, and shelter care home residents may qualify for the program.

Financial Eligibility

To be eligible for the Property Tax Relief program, your income and your spouse’s income combined must be below a certain amount. The program does not count the income of other people who live with you.

If you live alone, your income must be below \$21,218 per year. If you live with your spouse or someone who depends on you for more than half of their support, your total household income must be below \$28,480 per year. If you live with your spouse and one or more people who depend on you for more than half of their support, your total household income must be below \$35,740 per year. If you have no spouse but live with two or more people who depend on you for more than half of their support, your total household income must be below \$35,740 per year. These dollar amounts are subject to change.



ADVOCACY TIP

Although the income limits seem quite generous, if your household income is over \$14,000 per year, the maximum grant you can receive is only \$70.

How to Apply

You should apply for the Property Tax relief program directly to the Illinois Department on Aging on a short form which it provides. The application form comes with detailed instructions. The form combines the application for the Property Tax Relief Program and the Pharmaceutical Assistance Program. See the section in Chapter 2 of this Handbook titled, “*The Pharmaceutical Assistance Program: Illinois Cares Rx.*”

The application requires you to prove your age.

Examples: To prove your age, you can use your driver’s license, Illinois state ID card, a birth certificate, or several other forms of identification which are listed in the instructions.

If you do not qualify for the program on the basis of your age, you can qualify by proving that you are disabled.

Examples: If you receive Social Security, Veterans, Civil Service, or Railroad Retirement benefits for total disability, you will be considered disabled. If you have a Class 2 disability card from the Illinois Secretary of State, you will also be considered disabled.

If you cannot prove that you are disabled in one of these ways, your doctor can fill out a form about your medical condition provided by the Department on Aging. If you do not have a doctor, the Department may send you to a doctor of their choosing for a medical evaluation at your cost.

Determining the Amount of Your Grant

If your household income is above \$14,000 per year, your grant cannot be more than \$70. The vast majority of households with income above \$14,000 per year will receive the \$70 grant or slightly less. If your income is below \$14,000 per year, the amount of your grant is determined by a formula. Your grant will be one of the following two amounts, whichever is less (but which cannot exceed \$700):

- Your property tax bill minus 3.5% of your household income; or
- \$700 minus 4.5% of household income.

Example: If your countable household income is \$12,000 per year and your “property tax bill” is \$3,000, your grant will be \$160 (\$700 minus \$540).

If you rent: Use 25% of your actual rent as the figure for your “property tax bill” in order to determine the amount of your grant. If you reside in a nursing, shelter care, or retirement home: Use 6.25% of your monthly charges as your “property tax bill” in order to determine the amount of your grant.

If the Department on Aging approves your application, they will so inform the Illinois Secretary of State which will then send you a notice regarding a discount on your vehicle license plate. When you go to pay for your license plate fee, you will be eligible for a \$54 discount on the fee (for one vehicle per household).

How to Appeal a Decision With Which You Disagree

If the Department on Aging denies your application for the Property Tax Relief Program, or if you disagree with the amount of your grant, you have the right to request that the Department on Aging reconsider its decision. The request must be in writing.

The Department has 60 days to act on your request. If you disagree with the decision, you may appeal to your local Circuit Court by filing a lawsuit so the court can review the administrative decision. You must follow the rules of the Administrative Review Law in filing and proceeding with this type of lawsuit. You must file this lawsuit within 35 days from the date of the reconsidered decision. It is a good idea to seek professional legal advice as soon as you receive the reconsidered decision because of the short deadline for filing an administrative review action. If the Department on Aging does nothing within 60 days, you must consider the decision affirmed and file an administrative review action within 35 days from the sixtieth day.

Where to go for More Information

Statutes and Regulations

- The Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons Property Tax Relief and Pharmaceutical Assistance Act is found at 320 ILCS 25.
- The regulations implementing this Act are found at 86 Ill.Admin.Code 530.

Agencies and Organizations

The Illinois Department on Aging

If you have questions about the Property Tax Relief Program or wish to order application forms, contact the Illinois Department on Aging:

For questions about the program:

Chicago: 312-814-2630

Springfield: 217-785-3356

You may also obtain information and forms from the Department on Aging website: www.state.il.us/aging/

You can also get assistance from the Senior HelpLine:

800-252-8966 (Voice and TTY)